DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 392 744 SP 036 477

AUTHOR Dana, Nancy Fichtman; Westcott, Laurie
TITLE Creating Opportunities for Prospective Elementary and Early Childhood Teacher Reflection, Simulations, Teaching Cases, Portfolios, and More.
PUB DATE Nov 95
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators (St. Louis, MO, February 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Child Development Centers; *Child Development Specialists; Early Childhood Education; Educational Games; Elementary Education; Higher Education; Portfolios (Background Materials); *Preservice Teacher Education; *Reflective Teaching; *Simulated Environment; Simulation
IDENTIFIERS Pennsylvania State University; *Reflection Process; *Reflective Practice

ABSTRACT

Strategies for promoting reflection in prospective early childhood teachers are summarized. Each strategy was field tested and documented in the course "The Development and Administration of Child Service Programs," which was team taught during the summers of 1994 and 1995 at The Pennsylvania State University. About 30 students enrolled in each session. Following a brief overview of the course, each strategy is described, discussed, and assessed for its merit in promoting reflection in early childhood teachers. The course explored the background for setting up an early childhood center, described exemplary child care administrators and teachers and their practices, and finally, discussed issues of special concern. The strategies covered included "Opening a Center" simulation game, student authored cases, and portfolios. Results indicated the strategies were successful in promoting reflection among course participants. Excerpts from case studies and portfolios are included. (Contains 21 references.) (ND)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 392 744

# Creating Opportunities for Prospective Elementary and Early Childhood Teacher Reflection, Simulations, Teaching Cases, Portfolios, and More

Nancy Fichtman Dana
Assistant Professor of Early Childhood & Elementary Education

The Pennsylvania State University
172 Chambers Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 865-6568

Laurie Westcott
Doctoral Candidate in Early Childhood Education

The Pennsylvania State University
144 Chambers Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-1458

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Thematic Session presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators' Conference, St. Louis, MO, February 1996.

A version of this paper was presented at the 1995 National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators' meeting, November 1995.

SP 036 477



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

## Creating Opportunities for Reflection in the Education of Early Childhood Teachers

In recent years, there has been a move to reconceptualize teacher education from a set of technical skills prospective teachers must master and subsequently demonstrate during field experiences to a more reflective and critical examination of one's own teaching practices. Reflection can be seen as a way to integrate one's technical, scientific knowledge of teaching with the values, beliefs, and experiences that form one's personal knowledge of teaching. Bowman (1989) argues that this subjective knowledge base needs to be legitimized in order to fully understand the teaching process.

Reflective practice can be defined as a "challenging, focused, and critical assessment of one's own behavior as a means towards developing one's own craftsmanship" (Osterman, 1990, p. 134). Increasingly, in our rapidly changing world, teachers are being required to perform tasks for which they received little or no preparation in their professional education, as well as to deal with a multitude of conflicting values and purposes (Smyth, 1989). In addition, many prospective teachers enter their teacher education program with theories and beliefs that conflict with the theories that are being taught (Korthagen, 1992). Reflection is the process which makes it possible to learn from our experiences by thoughtfully modifying or eliminating existing ideas as well as adding new ones (Osterman, 1990). Therefore, many teacher educators are presently structuring programs and classes in order to create opportunities for prospective teachers to reflect on their own experiences as students and teachers as well as their own beliefs about teaching and learning (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1991).

The purpose of this paper is to summarize a variety of strategies for promoting reflection of early childhood prospective teachers. The strategies include an "Opening a Center" simulation game, student authored cases, and portfolios. Each strategy was field tested and documented in the teaching of ECE 454: The Development and Administration of Child Service Programs, team taught by the authors during the summers of 1994 and 1995 at The Pennsylvania State

University. Following a brief overview of the course, each strategy will be described, discussed and assessed for its merit in promoting reflection in early childhood teachers.

## Overview of Course

ECE 454 is a required course for early childhood education majors at The Pennsylvania State University. The course is designed to introduce prospective teachers to the planning, organizing, and administering of child service programs through readings, discussions, small and large group activities, guest speakers, and community day care observations. Required texts for the course include Ayers' The Good Preschool Teacher: Six Teachers Reflect on Their Lives, Cherry, Harkness, and Kuzma's Nursery School and Day Care Center Management Guide, and Leavitt's Power and Emotion in Infant-Toddler Day Care.

The course, offered each Fall and Summer at Penn State, services approximately 30 students each session. During the summers, the class is offered during a four week intensive intersession in May, meeting Mondays through Thursdays from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a. m. It was during the summer session that the strategies described in this paper were first developed and field tested.

When offered in the summer, the class is divided into three parts. In part I of the class, lasting approximately one week, students build a foundation for the entire course by reading the Cherry text and getting acquainted through working with each other and discussing some basic aspects about starting a center. This, to a great extent, is accomplished through the "Opening A Center" simulation game to be described in the next section of this paper. In addition, a number of directors of various child care centers discuss their programs and their roles as administrators in a panel format. Finally, students review licensing requirements for the State of Pennsylvania.

Part II of the class, entitled "Exemplary Programs, People and Practices," lasts approximately one and one half weeks. In this component of the course, students learn about exemplary child care administrators, teachers and their practices through readings and observations at a child care facility. Classes do not meet on campus for one week, during which time students report directly to an assigned child care facility to complete participant

observations. Students describe and reflect on their experiences during this week in a field note journal. The instructors visit each student at their respective centers.

Additionally, students complete an "Exemplary Teacher Review." Each student is assigned one of the teachers described in the Ayers' text to prepare a one page summary which is then used to lead a small group discussion. Students are asked to provide a brief summary of the teacher as well as reflect on what they learned from this teacher about exemplary teaching and administration, and identify issues in child care that emerge from their teacher's story.

Part III of the class, entitled, "Issues of Special Concern and Putting It All Together" lasts approximately one and one half weeks. During these final days of the course, students are given the opportunity to make sense of what they have learned throughout the semester. This is accomplished through two of the strategies described in this paper, case study discussions and final portfolio development, as well as revisiting issues and experiences previously discussed through reading and reacting to the Leavitt text.

Throughout the entire course, the instructors strive to create opportunities for the students to voice their own values and opinions, listen to opposing viewpoints, achieve a sense of membership in a group, work in small groups towards consensus, recognize and represent different issues, challenge negative stereotypes, use resources, and observe and talk with positive role models, people who are engaged in advocating for better child care. It is through these opportunities that students can develop the reflective skills necessary to administer child service programs and become an advocate for Early Childhood Education. This paper focuses on three specific teacher education pedagogical strategies incorporated into the class to promote reflection.

## Promoting Reflection in Early Childhood Teachers: Three Strategies

"Opening A Center" Simulation Game. The "Opening A Center" simulation game was developed by the authors based on the work of Nelson & Singleton (1981) on decision grids. Originally developed as a social action tool used to enhance understanding of local government and community services when teaching the social studies (Nelson & Singleton, 1977; 1978), in

the early 1980's, Nelson and Singleton designed a decision grid exercise to illustrate the difficulties involved in planning for a middle school when funds do not allow for all desired programs and facilities.

Using the "middle school decision grid" as a model, the "opening a center" decision grid (Figure 1—shown on page 5) was constructed and used on the first day of class. Students were presented with the scenario that just after graduating with their Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education, they inherit a sum of money and decide to use that money to realize their dream of opening their own child care center. Yet, they are faced with a familiar problem—there is too little money for everything that is desired. Therefore, they are forced to make some choices regarding how they will use their funds.

Students are given a list of 20 concepts/resources often associated with day care centers, and must place each item on one of the spaces on the decision grid. There are four spaces each for items with which they strongly agree, somewhat agree, are neutral, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree. Inevitably, students encounter difficulty because there are more items with which they agree with than there are number of agree spaces on the grid. Yet, it is through forced placement of one item per box on the grid that students begin to confront the relative values they hold for a number of concepts associated with the operation of a child care facility.

After completing the grid individually, students are placed into groups of four. Each group receives one large duplication of the decision grid (approximately 2' by 3') and a "deck of 20 cards." Each card depicts a different child care facility resource/concept that were ranked by the individuals. In the time allotted (usually approximately 40 minutes), groups must assign each of the 20 cards to various spaces on the grid. Each card must be placed in a different category and all the spaces must be filled by group consensus in order to achieve successful completion of the task.

Figure 1

**Opening a Center**

You have just graduated from Penn State with a degree in ECE and you need to find a job! Just as you begin your job search, you inherit a sum of money. You decide to use this opportunity to realize your dream of opening your own child care center. You have budgeted for necessities such as furniture, toys, and basic art supplies, but your money is limited and you need to make some decisions on how to best use your remaining funds. Below are 20 resources often associated with daycare centers. Please place each on the accompanying grid.

1. Staff ratios of 1 teacher to 4 infants, 1 teacher to 6 toddlers, and 1 teacher to 10 pre-schoolers
2. NAEYC accreditation
3. Indoor/outdoor equipment such as sandbox, water table, climbers, tricycles
4. Building plans by an architect specializing in the design of space for young children
5. A nutritionist/cook to plan and prepare meals and snacks
6. TV/VCR with an extensive collection of children's videos
7. A separate room for sick children, with staff attendant
8. Computer and educational software
9. A full-time director
10. Adapted materials/equipment for children with special needs
11. Advertising funds
12. Staff training workshop
13. A commercially prepared preschool curriculum
14. Record/tape player with a supply of songs and books on tape
15. Custodian or cleaning service
16. A library of children's literature and Big Books
17. Anti-bias curriculum materials
18. Safety equipment: sprinkler system, fencing for playground
19. Piano and rhythm instruments
20. Parent/teacher resource library

| STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | NEUTRAL | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

One card is exposed at a time in a random order as individual group members discuss the concept, where they feel it should be placed and why, and finally come to a collective decision regarding where they will place it on the group grid. Some basic rules govern this process:

(1) Each card must be placed before the next one is revealed.

(2) Each of the four members of the group is assigned one horizontal role which they "control." Control of a row means that the individual has the power to accept or reject the use of any compartment in any of the five value sections across the grid in his/her row.

(3) No card may be placed in any row without the permission of the individual who controls that row.

(4) Once a card is placed, it may not be moved. After a group places the 20 cards initially, they are instructed that they may now move cards laterally but a move can only be made if there is 100% group agreement.

During the group part of the activity, lively discussions take place as individuals confront different opinions regarding where certain items should be placed and why. Prospective teachers are given the opportunity to articulate their values and opinions, and in the process, clarify their beliefs about the operation of a child care center.

The simulation does not end after all the cards are placed. Careful debriefing by the instructors is perhaps the most important part of the game. We ask each group to copy their group grid onto the blackboard and then give time for a representative from each group to discuss some of the decisions that their group made and why. We ask each group to share which concepts were particularly easy and difficult for them to place and to describe the nature of the discussion that the group had in order to come to a consensus on where to place these items. Following each group's presentation, we ask the class to look across all of the decision grids on the board for common themes by asking questions such as, "Were there certain concepts that each group placed in the same compartment?"

A common "strongly agree" item is staff ratios. We use this as an opportunity to discuss critiques of "staff ratios" as often the only measure of quality in early childhood programs. For example, regulations in the state of Pennsylvania specify staff ratios, but say nothing about what the nature of the interactions between staff and children should be. Hence, a low staff-child ratio does not necessarily ensure that quality programming is taking place.

One common "strongly disagree" item is a sick room for children. Most prospective teachers articulate that if a child is sick, they should be (and would be most comfortable) home with Mom or Dad. We use this as an opportunity to discuss the social context within which a center exists. We raise the issue that for some parents, if they miss a day at work, it means that they will not have a job to return to the following day. Additionally, depending on the home environment, home might not be the "best place" for a sick child. We begin a discussion on the devaluing of parenting (as well as child care providers) by society.

By debriefing in the manner described above, we strive to make explicit as well as call into question some of the commonly held beliefs and assumptions about child care that early childhood prospective teachers enter the field with. The activity serves as a basis for continued discussion and debate throughout the course regarding not only the practicalities and realities of opening and running a child care facility, but the larger issues inherent in how one chooses to operate a center.

We collect each individual's grid at the end of the first day of class, as well as request that students write a brief reflection paper on the activity itself. Students' responses indicate that the decision grid is a meaningful first day class activity that sets the stage for a course that will be discussion based and highly interactive:

> It was actually worth getting up this morning to go to ECE 454. I really enjoy interacting with other people and this class gave me the chance to do just that. I liked being able to voice my opinions and ideas as well as listen to others do the same. In the beginning of my group's discussion, I thought that having an architect to design the space for the children was not very important. A member of our group talked about how a daycare center could be improved when an architect designed the building. I now agree with this member's view on this topic. Our group exchanged stories about places where we have worked with children. I think the activity sparked discussion and learning throughout the whole class. I learned that there are many things to take into consideration when deciding

> on any of the components that were listed on our sheets. (Student reflection, May 8, 1995)

In addition, engaging in this activity led students to reflect on how their own backgrounds shape the ways they perceive child care, as well as the values they attach to how child care is actualized. For example, many students in class noted the differences that existed between students in the class who were majoring in early childhood education (ECE) and students in the class who were majoring in human development and family studies (HDFS), but attached value to hearing and understanding the differing perspectives that emerged from these two groups:

> I really enjoyed today's in-class activity. It was the first time I had ever been asked to share my view point on what I thought would be the best way to spend money on resources for a child care facility. I found it difficult to pinpoint my top priorities. From the group discussion, I recognized different viewpoints between HDFS and ECE majors. Despite the differences in opinions it was nice to hear others' viewpoints and ideas on what is the best way to spend our money and on which resources. In conclusion, I believe that this activity had a great impact on me and the group that I participated in. It has me thinking a lot about what is best for the day care center and for the children and their families. (Student reflection, May 8, 1995)

Another student beautifully identified and articulated the nature of her own background, how it shaped the ways she responded to the grid activity, and the advantage she found in being assigned to a group in which many of the members came from different backgrounds:

> Through doing this activity I actually had to seriously think about what I thought was important to have in day care facilities. I was able to use my past experience working in different child care settings as a basis for deciding how important each aspect was.
>
> I found this activity to be rather difficult. I felt that all components are important to have in all facilities. However, having worked in two very different child care facilities I saw how limited the funds were. This limited amount of funds is reality. I saw how teachers and the different directors had to pick and choose materials that were within their allotted budget.
>
> I was assigned to a group in which many of the members came from different backgrounds and practices working with children. I found, through this activity, despite our different backgrounds, that we were able to work together as a team. It appeared as if we all felt differently depending on our past experience and knowledge gained throughout our college career. However, we were able to use these differing opinions to our advantage. We taught each other about some teaching skills we learned. We were also able to share our ideas about the tradeoffs when ranking the importance of various components. Through my group I also saw how different components could be taken up in different ways. For example, full time director was one component we viewed differently. Two of us felt as if it was imperative to have a director where the other two viewed this as not being important because they saw their position as owner of the center as being the director.

> This activity, despite its difficulty, opened up many doors for me to explore and to think about. (Student reflection, May 8, 1995)

Finally, some student responses indicated that students not only recognized how their own backgrounds shaped their perceptions of child care, but recognized and become critical of the ways their background had shaped their response to this activity, as indicated by the following two student reflections:

> With the grid activity I learned a lot from my group members. I have not had the advantage of working in daycares, so I learned things about children going to daycare sick, the home status of my children and the way day cares are run. I did not realize how important a cook or nutritionist was until members of the group brought up that many children do not get hot nutritious meals at home. It reminded me to stop thinking as a middle class woman with two parents and realize that all children do not have it so lucky. (Student reflection, May 8, 1995)

> During today's activity, many thoughts and ideas came to my mind. When I did the activity myself, I found that I believed all 20 of the elements would be beneficial. Of course some (such as "safety equipment") were more obviously needed than others. However, after discussion with my group, I realized that they had different perspectives regarding what's important and why. For example, I placed staff training as disagree because I assumed that the staff would have training when hired. I viewed "staff training" as additional to what they already had. One of my group members, however, perceived "staff training" as the only training the staff received. Another example of my assumptions was dealing with "nutritionist/cook." I said that this was fairly unimportant because the children could bring their lunches from home, and the teachers could easily prepare a nutritious snack. But I didn't think about poorer areas and lower-class children whose only meal may be at the daycare center. For these children, having a "nutritionist/cook" is much more critical. I believe that this exercise make me realize some of my own values, as well as those of others. If I ever plan to open a center, I will keep in mind these values and the 20 given elements. I think it's important to critically examine our own beliefs/attitudes, as well as those of the geographic location where we are planning to open the center. With these things in mind, a program could be established that would serve the children and the community well. (Student reflection, May 8, 1995)

We repeat the activity during one of the last classes of the course. We then hand back the original grids each individual completed and ask students to reflect on any changes in their grids. Student responses indicate that repeating the activity provided them with an opportunity to reflect on how their beliefs have changed over the course of the semester. Additionally, most students found the activity easier to complete at the end of the course because they felt more knowledgeable about the nature of and the issues inherent in developing and administering a child service program, and therefore better able to articulate and justify their views:

> WOW! What a difference 4 weeks makes! As I completed this activity for the second time, I realized how much my ideas and values had changed. For example, today while doing this activity, I placed more value on having a full-time director. On May 8, I placed director at neutral because I thought the teachers could divide the administrative duties. However, today I placed director in the agree column because I know now that a director has too many responsibilities that it would be difficult for the teachers to do both. I thought it was somewhat easier to make my decisions today because I was more informed. (Student reflection, May 31, 1995)

> I found the activity to be much easier the second time around. As I spent the past four weeks reading, discussing, and learning from others' view points, I found many views I previously had changed greatly! This tells me that it's been a very productive four weeks. This activity is an "eye opening" experience. It has helped me to consider other possible options and has encouraged me to weigh the pros and cons! Out of the twenty choices I had to make on the list for the decision grid, only 4 stayed the exact same since the first day of class. I feel as though I am much more certain about my list than I was the first day of class! (Student reflection, May 31, 1995)

Student Written Cases. Following their intensive field experience in a child care center, the students were asked to write a case study. Cases can be defined as "vicarious experiences that facilitate the student teachers' inquiry into pedagogical problems" (Harrington & Garrison, 1992, p. 721). Working with cases allows students to develop conditional (contextual) knowledge about teaching in addition to the more traditional declarative (content) and procedural (methods) knowledge (Harrington, 1991).

Cases were described to the students as a story or description of "happenings" from a child care program. According to Harrington (1991), cases "begin the cognitive development which enables teachers to recognize specific events as problematic, to gain an understanding of them, to reflect on them and the consequences of action, and to devise sensible, moral, and educative ways of acting" (p. 3). Students could write either an "open case" in which they described the problematic situation and "left the ending off," with questions for discussion with their classmates, or a "closed case" in which the author provided an ending and classmates provided feedback on the ending as well as alternative solutions. By having the students reconstruct their experiences in the process of writing their cases, they may develop an understanding of the situation that was not available to them at the time of the original experience (Shulman, 1991).

Students were asked to chose a topic of interest to them and to be creative in their choice of format when writing the case. Topics chosen included issues of diversity, inclusion of children with special needs, communication with parents, appropriate curriculum, and classroom management. Most cases were written in the form of a third-person narrative, although some chose to write it in the first person as a journal entry. A few students wrote their cases in a letter format. These included letters home to Mom, letters to a colleague asking for advice, and letters from a parent unhappy with the preschool curriculum. A summary of student written cases from the Summer 1994 class is represented in Figure 2—see pages 12 and 13.

An important component of this assignment was the sharing and discussion of the cases in class. Discussing a case helps to develop "understandings, insights, and empathy" (Shulman, 1991). Levin (1995) found that student teachers who discussed cases were better able to elaborate their thinking and increase their perspective on the issues than those who simply read and wrote about a case.

Students were placed in small groups of approximately five and asked to bring a copy of their case for each group member on the designated day. Each group member was expected to share his or her case and lead a discussion based on the following questions: What are the key issues involved? Who are the key people involved? What are the possible solutions? (discuss pros and cons of each) What factors affect your choice of a solution? Which solution would you choose to implement? (why?). Two different examples of student written cases with the group's discussion notes appear in Figures 3 and 4—see pages 14 and 15.

In discussing various solutions, students started to realize the complexity of the problem solving process. For example, in the case that appears in figure 3, a parent has written a letter to the teacher of her child's preschool class because she is concerned that there is a lack of structure and academic curriculum. When the students discussed this case, they generated three possible solutions and discussed the pros and cons of each. Each proposed solution had its own unique possibilities and constraints, affording students the opportunity to assess what course of action they might take in the situation.

Figure 2.

| Issue | Summary of Case | Format |
|---|---|---|
| Abuse/sexual | A teacher suspects that one of her students may be sexually abused. | First person narrative |
| Abuse/verbal | A teacher responds to a child's directions about how to play with hostility and name-calling. | Third person narrative |
| Behavior | During free play a child takes a string of beads from the manipulative area to the block area. The teacher insists that the beads only be used in the designated area | Third person narrative |
| Behavior/aggression | Child bullies peers but is pleasant and friendly when he has adult attention. | Letter to Mom |
| Behavior/aggression | Teacher uses accident log to discover a pattern in a child's persistent biting behavior. | Third person intro/ first person narrative |
| Behavior/childhood stress | A child exhibits behaviors that suggest high levels of anxiety and anger. | First person narrative |
| Behavior/discipline | Child resists efforts to control his behavior, resulting in a clash of wills between teacher and child. | First person/journal entry |
| Behavior/illness | Teacher discovers that child's uncooperative behavior may be due to difficulty in hearing resulting from the congestion associated with colds. | First person/journal entry |
| Behavior/time- out | A Down's Syndrome child is punished for destructive behavior by placing him in time-out. He is often left there for most of the playtime. | Third person narrative |
| Behavior/time-out | A child bites another and is placed in time-out without discussion. The teacher who placed her there forgets about her and eventually another teacher lets her get up. | Third person narrative |
| Curriculum; home/school communication | A parent is concerned because her kindergartner is not reading or writing yet. | Letter to colleague |
| Curriculum; home/school communication | After observing, a parent is concerned that there is a lack of structure and academic curriculum in her daughter's preschool class. | Letter from parent |
| Death | When the class pet dies, the teacher must decide how to explain the situation to her students. | First person narrative |
| Death | A child's grandfather dies and the teacher must decide how much to explain to the other children. | Third person narrative |
| Death | The class pet rabbit dies suddenly, perhaps as a result of one child's cruelty. The teacher must deal with her own feelings of loss as well as explaining the situation to the children. | Third person narrative |
| Death; home/school communication | Child is upset over the death of her grandmother; parent requests teacher's help in dealing with the issue. | Parent/teacher letters |

Figure 2 (Continued)

| Issue | Summary of Case | Format |
|---|---|---|
| Diversity/anti-bias | Teacher decides to bring multicultural experiences into a homogeneous class by developing a reciprocal relationship with a Mexican-American "sister school." | First person narrative/journal entry |
| Diversity/bias | Teachers in a multicultural preschool classroom must deal with name-calling between the African-American and Chinese students. | Third person narrative |
| Health; AIDS | A director makes a controversial decision to enroll a child who is HIV positive. | First person narrative/journal |
| Home/school communication: homosexuality | Teachers attempt to satisfy children's curiosity about a student with two mothers without offending other parents. | First person narrative |
| Home/school communication: divorce | A child becomes withdrawn as a result of his parents' divorce. | Third person narrative |
| Home/school communication: divorce | Child suddenly begins acting out and not taking work home. When mother is finally contacted it is learned that the father has left home. | Third person narrative |
| Home/school communication: separation anxiety | A mother has difficulty saying goodbye and leaving her child at preschool—although the child herself does not seem to mind the separation. | Letter to Mom |
| Home/school communication: separation anxiety | A toddler becomes upset when his father leaves him at daycare—and his crying persists throughout the day. | Letter to colleague |
| Home/school communication: latchkey children | A parent requests advice for dealing with her 12-year-old who is home alone after school. | Third person narrative |
| Parent/child relationship | Mother is concerned that her daughter is becoming overly attached to daycare workers at the expense of the maternal relationship. | Third person narrative |
| Parent/child relationship | Father has trouble understanding how to play with his son. Grandmother interferes and compounds the problem. | Third person narrative |
| Special needs | A mother is overprotective of her handicapped daughter and resists teacher's attempts to promote the child's independence by teaching her to feed herself. | First person narrative |
| Special needs/bilingual | A child enters preschool speaking only French. Communication was limited since teachers did not speak French. | First person narrative |
| Special needs/gifted | Child is advanced academically but lacks social skills; does not want to be singled out as different. | Letter to colleague |
| Special needs/physical disability | A director feels unprepared to deal with a child in a wheel chair. | Third person narrative |

Figure 3 (Student Case and Discussion Notes)

Dear Ms. Seyler,

On Tuesday, May 16, I had the opportunity to observe my daughter, Sally, through the center's observation room. I spent approximately two hours watching Sally interact with the two assistants, her teacher, and classmates.

I must admit that what I observed was not at all what I expected to see. I was hoping to observe Sally involved in some form of academic learning. To my surprise, all I observed was Sally and her classmates playing freely for the entire two hours. I observed no structured activities or academic curriculum. The children ran freely around the room and there was constant commotion going on.

I thought to myself: "These children are not being appropriately challenged for future academic learning." Every parent would like to see their child succeed academically for a better future. I am disturbed to see that the center is failing to have any interest in my child's educational future.

In my opinion, allowing children to freely play without structure for two hours is not an effective form of academic learning. The children are just having "fun." I am very concerned about the academic welfare of my child.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

---

HDFS/ECE 454: Case Study Discussion Summary Sheet

Name *Amy Seyler* Topic *Is "play" learning?*

1. What are the key issues involved?

   *Play vs. academics . . . is there a difference?*

2. Who are the key people involved?

   *Parent, Child, Administration*

3. List possible solutions (discuss pros and cons):

   *Pro: Talk (personal) to parent. Con: (Teacher may get defensive)*
   *Pro: Write back responding in return (no risk of defense if co-worker proofreads). Con: Impersonal*
   *Pro: Attach article—great info. Con: Too professional. Parent may not understand—uneducated!*

4. List factors which might affect your choice of solution:

   *—Previous relationship with Jane Doe*
   *—Writing skills vs. "personal" skills*
   *---Availability of resources*

5. Which solution would you choose to implement? Why:

   *Personally talking to the parent—offering the article for reference. Invite her back after our conference and after she's read the article. Let the parent observe after evaluating other opinion on play.*

Figure 4 (Student Case and Discussion Notes)

Case Study

Karen and Sandy teach a mixed ability preschool class of eight children, including a boy with Downs Syndrome and a girl with severely delayed speech. The teachers believe that play is important to learning, that children learn through exploring their environments, and are familiar to the guidelines of developmentally appropriate practice. Because of their experience with children with special needs, Karen and Sandy try to follow a very structured routine every day.

In their class indoor free play lasts from 9:45 to 10:30 each morning and the children are able to choose from a housekeeping/dramatic play area, a child-size workbench, a puzzle area, a daily activity such as painting or drawing, a block area, and the library corner. Today several of the boys have taken on a project in the block area, creating an elaborate network of train tracks. Joshua, talking quietly to himself, decided he is going to be the conductor of the longest train. Purposefully he walks over to the puzzle shelf and takes down a large coffee can filled with shoelaces and colored beads of various sizes and shapes. Quickly and carefully he fills a string with beads and returns to his track, where he carries on a dialogue with himself and his play partners about the trains, where he is going, and how fast his train moves. He continues, engrossed in his play, until Karen sees that he has brought the string of beads into the block area. She crosses the room and touches Joshua on the shoulder. When he looks up she says quietly, "Joshua, either play with the blocks or with the beads. Remember that we play with the beads only at the puzzle table, not in the block area." Joshua lowers his eyes, but grips his train of beads tightly in his fist and does not move. "Joshua," Karen repeats, "if you want to play with the beads you must take them to the table. You may not keep them here. You choose." Angrily Joshua throws the beads down, kicks over the train track and runs to the housekeeping area where he pushes his way into the other children's play. The happy chatter of busy children is interrupted with cries of "Hey, he messed up my track!" and "That's mine. I had it first."

- Do you think that this scene is an accurate picture of free play?
- Would you have handled the situation differently? How? Why?

---

HDFS/ECE 454: Case Study Discussion Summary Sheet

Name *Amy Wanner* Topic *Free Play*

1. What are the key issues involved?

   *—meaning of free play; restrictions/classroom rules; self-control*

2. Who are the key people involved?

   *—child; teacher(s); other children in class*

3. List possible solutions (discuss pros and cons):

   —teacher asks child about actions/try to understand child's reasons
   —encourage child to express feelings with words
   —teachers re-evaluate their definition of free play and possibly restructure class structure
   —teacher more sensitive to child's behavior and non-verbal cues

4. List factors which might affect your choice of solution:

   —teachers see need for classroom organization and play space
   —special needs children (often need more structured environment)
   —time needed to talk with child one on one

5. Which solution would you choose to implement? Why:

   In this situation, I think that the teachers have the responsibility and the power to change. I think that I would use all four of the solutions listed because they all address different parts of the problem.

In the case that appears in Figure 4, during free play a child takes a string of beads from the manipulative area to the block area. The teacher insists that the beads only be used in the designated area. When students discussed this case, they discovered that even when the stated problem involved only two people, a teacher and a child for example, the solution might have an impact on many other children and teachers at the center. Practical matters such as available time and resources also had to be considered, making the decision about the "best" solution more difficult. In the words of one student, "I think that I would use all four of the solutions listed because they all address different parts of the problem."

Portfolios. Portfolios are becoming more popular as an alternative form of assessment in teacher education. Portfolios have several distinguishing features: they allow students to integrate their ideas and show growth over time, emphasizing production over recognition; projects demonstrate depth rather than breadth; and informed judgment on the part of the teacher replaces mechanical scoring procedures (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993). Another feature of portfolio assessment is that it shifts the ownership of the learning from the teacher to the student (Barton & Collins, 1993). The process of creating a portfolio provides an opportunity for self-assessment and reflection, as well as producing a product for evaluation by others (Ryan & Kuhs, 1993).

Portfolios were developed by each student in this class to represent their learning over the course of the semester. The assignment was described in detail on the second day of class to allow students the time and opportunity to work on portfolio development over the course of the entire semester. A handout was used to describe the requirements for the project (Figure 5—see Page 17).

Portfolios contained four types of evidence: (1) Artifacts; ( 2) Reproductions; (3) Attestations; and (4) Productions. Artifacts include documents produced in or as apart of class or at the center where the student was observing. Many students included their decision grid activity as evidence of how their thinking had changed over the semester. Others included information they had gathered about particular issues of interest to them or potions of the book reviews assigned in class.

Figure 5

Portfolio Handout

PURPOSE

What is a portfolio? Not a scrapbook with everything in it but a collection of evidence with a purpose . . . that purpose is usually to have students show what they know and are able to do. In 454, you will use your portfolio to indicate what you have learned during the course of the semester.

STRUCTURE

Types of Evidence

» **Artifacts**—documents produced in or as a part of class or at the center where you are observing (notes from guest speakers, values grid, handouts, documents your center produces etc.)

» **Reproductions**—documents about class or your experience that are not usually captured (photographs of your center experience, journal entries about a particular day in class or experience at your center)

» **Attestations**—documents about the work of the student prepared by others (the director of the center, a teacher, other students in class)

» **Productions**—documents prepared by the portfolio developer especially for the portfolio

**Required Productions:**

Goal Statement/Road Map: personalization of the portfolio purpose; a guide to lead the reader through the portfolio (what would you tell someone so he/she could follow and understand your portfolio?)

Captions/Tags: a statement attached to each document by portfolio developer to describe what the document is, why it is evidence, and what it is evidence of (transforms document into evidence)

Final Reflective Statement: summarizes documents in portfolio and articulates what has been learned

» **How much evidence should be included?**

* One piece is not enough!!
* Everything is too much!!
* Use value-added principle:

Look at all possible evidence and decide if each piece adds value and strength to make a compelling argument.

REMEMBER: LESS IS OFTEN MORE!

Reproductions are documents about class or a student's experience that are not usually captured. These mostly included portions of class notes or photographs and journal entries about their center experience. However, many students also included copies of poems that meant something to them or photographs of family members and former teachers who had had an influence on their thinking about some of the issues raised in class.

Attestations are documents about the work of the student prepared by others, for example, an evaluation written by the director of the center where the student had observed. Most portfolios completed for this course did not include this aspect.

Productions are documents prepared by the student especially for the portfolio. Required productions included: (1) Goal Statement/Road Map—a guide to lead the reader through the portfolio; (2) Captions/Tags—a statement attached to each document by the student to describe what the document is, why it is evidence of learning, and what it is evidence of; and (3) Final Reflective Statement —a summary of documents in the portfolio which articulates what has been learned. These reflections form the basis for pulling the portfolio together into a coherent piece of work.

When the portfolio was assigned and explained on the second day of class, a holistic scoring rubric (Figure 6—see Page 19) was also distributed to guide students through their portfolio development. Although it provided focus for the project, the rubric was generic enough to allow students to focus on their own interests as well as the activities pursued in class (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991). Students were encouraged to be creative in presenting their portfolio, but also to be selective and to make reasoned choices about what to include. While most students developed their portfolios around the general theme of "What I Learned," a few chose themes such as "Power and Emotion," "Respect," or "Fact and Fiction." Others chose to focus their portfolios on specific topics such as inclusion, play, or child abuse, although these portfolios tended to be narrower in scope.

Figure 6

Holistic Scoring Rubric

**An "A" Portfolio**. An A portfolio is exciting (and perhaps even inspiring!) to examine. An A portfolio accurately conveys to the instructor an original but viable understanding of what the development and administration of child care services entails, what information is known concerning fundamental aspects of child care, and the ways in which the individual will use their knowledge of child care in the future. The portfolio reflects its creator's growth this semester and personal philosophy of administering and/or teaching in the early childhood settings. The portfolio contains materials (along with required productions) that emanate from a variety of sources including ECE/HDFS 454 class sessions, textbook and other readings, field experience, and personal thoughts and experiences. There is evidence that the portfolio was well planned (i.e., evidence was selected carefully and is not redundant; special productions were well crafted and easily guide the reader through the portfolio). An A portfolio represents considerable effort, learning, growth, and reflection.

**A "B" Portfolio**. A B Portfolio is satisfactory, but lacks the creativity and evidence of personal growth and reflection apparent in an A portfolio. There is evidence that the student has spent quality time working on the project, but more personal growth and reflection is needed to come to a richer understanding of what it means to develop and administer child service programs. The portfolio contains materials (along with required productions) that emanate from a variety of sources including HDFS/ECE 454 class sessions, textbook and other readings, field experience, and personal thoughts and experiences. In some places, evidence may be redundant or not compelling. Portfolio represents considerable effort.

**A "C" Portfolio**. A C Portfolio demonstrates an understanding of materials presented throughout the semester but is limited in the material presented or too much material is presented and therefore the portfolio takes on a "scrap book" format. The material presented may be superficial and difficult to follow (i.e., some captions may be missing, organization is poor). The portfolio is dominated mainly by materials emanating from one or two sources only (class sessions or field experience). It is clear that more personal growth and reflection is needed to come to a richer understanding of what it means to develop and administer child service programs.

**An "F" Portfolio**. An F portfolio shows a lack of preparation, planning, and depth. Major portions may be lacking, and/or there is no apparent underlying theme or rationale for material selected for the portfolio. It is clear that the student has put little or no effort into the creation of the portfolio.

Three themes emerged from these portfolio reflections: (1) the difficulty of trying to represent knowledge; (2) the value of sharing ideas; and (3) the continuous nature of the learning process.

The concept of representing their own learning was new to many students. They worried about what they "should" include. Although they were instructed to be selective, many students felt that deciding what not to include was a challenging process:

> "Overall, I don't think that I could have included enough in this portfolio to show my true knowledge. I went from zero to amazing, and that is hard to represent without looking redundant." (Student portfolio)

However, once the portfolio process was complete students often expressed surprise at how much they had learned:

> "I am not even sure I can fully articulate everything I have learned in the last four weeks. I have learned to look at child care as much more than glorified baby-sitting . . . ." (Student portfolio)

The opportunities the students were given to share and discuss their ideas with peers also made a strong impression on them. Some found it reassuring that "We all have common concerns and can help each other by offering advice and experiences" (student portfolio) while others valued the diversity of opinions:

> The opportunity to hear others experiences and ideas has heightened my awareness and broadened my knowledge. (Student portfolio)

By sharing these experiences, students gained respect not only for themselves and each other, but for the adults and children they encountered in their child care experiences:

> I have gained more respect for individuals and their differences. . . . As a result of this class, I have a positive outlook on children as loving individuals and not as 'rug rats'." (student portfolio)

One student summarized the complexity of the process of evaluating others' opinions critically when they challenged his previously held beliefs:

> As I learned more of daycare, as well as more about my values this semester, more questions popped into my head concerning what I thought was quality daycare. During my learning process, I solidified old beliefs as well as challenged them. I critically assessed new issues. I deeply thought about how I should relate to or with children, how I could better care for them. This portfolio represents the struggle I had while thinking about all these issues. (student portfolio)

Finally, students realized that learning is a process that continues well beyond the scope of a single course. While they all felt that they had learned a great deal, many expressed the feeling that "I still have so much to learn, and I'm sure even seasoned veterans do, too." (student portfolio) One student put it in the larger context of lifelong professional growth:

> Through this course, I have come to realize, however, that this road is one which never comes to a conclusion, there are no dead ends. Teaching, I have found, is a constant growth and we must continue throughout our lives to travel the highway toward the goal of being the best educator we can be. (student portfolio)

## Conclusions

During the past decade, change and reform in teacher education has been receiving increased attention with a particular emphasis on promoting reflection as an integral component in the education of prospective and practicing teachers. According to Goffin & Day (1994), however, "until recently, the spotlight has shined primarily on the preparation of elementary and secondary teachers in public schools. Consistent with their separate social and political history, teachers of early childhood education were omitted" (p. 1) from larger discussions of teacher education and reflection. The purpose of this paper was to focus on three strategies that can be used to promote reflection that are specific to early childhood teachers. For:

> University lecture halls must be transformed into classroom communities that, like early childhood classrooms, support risk taking and recognize errors as a valuable part of the learning process. More class time should be given to group projects, open discussions, and sharing. Divergent viewpoints must be encouraged and explored. Education students must be actively engaged in identifying and analyzing problems and brainstorming possible solutions in their college classes so that they well be prepared to do the same in their own classrooms (Albarado, J., 1994, p. 56).

The strategies described in this paper enabled this to happen. We hope that the description of these strategies will serve as an impetus for additional dialogue on reflection and its role in the education of early childhood teachers.

References

Albarado, J. (1994). You might as well go on home. In S. G. Goffin, & D. E. Day (Eds.), New perspectives in early childhood teacher education (pp. 48-58). New York: Teachers College Press

Ayers, W. (1989). The good preschool teacher: Six teachers reflect on their lives. New York: Teachers College Press.

Barton, J. & Collins, A. (1993). Portfolios in teacher education. Journal of Teacher Education, 44, 200-210.

Bowman, B. T. (1989). Self-reflection as an element of professionalism. Teachers College Record, 90, 444-451.

Calfee, R. C. & Perfumo, P. (1993). Student portfolios: Opportunities for a revolution in assessment. Journal of Reading, 36, 532-537.

Cherry, C., Harkness, B. & Kuzma, K. (1987). Nursery school and day care center management guide. Belmont, CA: David S. Lake Publishers.

Day, D. E., & Goffin, S. G. (1994). Early childhood teacher education in context. In S. G. Goffin, & D. E. Day (Eds.), New perspectives in early childhood teacher education (pp. 1-14).

Harrington, H. (1991). The case as method. Action in Teacher Education, 12 (4), 1-10.

Harrington, H. L. & Garrison, J. W. (1992). Cases as shared inquiry: A dialogical model of teacher preparation. American Educational Research Journal, 29, 715-735.

Korthagen, F. A. J. (1992).Techniques for stimulating reflection in teacher education seminars. Teaching & Teacher Education, 8, 265-274.

Leavitt, R. L. (1994). Power and emotion in infant-toddler day care. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

Levin, B. B. (1995). Using the case method in teacher education: The role of discussion and experience in teachers' thinking about cases. Teaching & Teacher Education, 11, 63-79.

Nelson, M. R. & Singleton, H. W. (1977). Small group decision making for social action. In D. Kurfman (Ed.), Developing decision-making skills (pp. 140-172). Washington, DC: National Council for the Social Studies.

Nelson, M. R. & Singleton, H. W. (1981). Using a grid model: Decision making and middle school organization. National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, 65,(442), 101-106.

Osterman, K. F. (1990). Reflective practice: A new agenda for education. Education and Urban Society, 22, 133-152.

Ryan, J. M. & Kuhs, T. M. (1993). Assessment of preservice teachers and the use of portfolios. Theory into Practice, 32, 75-81.

Singleton, H. W. & Nelson, M. R. (1978). Decision making for social action in local government. In J. J. Chiodo (Ed.), Teaching about local government (pp. 8-10). Dayton, Ohio: Great Lakes Council for the Social Studies.

Shulman, J. H. (1991). Revealing the mysteries of teacher-written cases: Opening the black box. Journal of Teacher Education, 42, 250-262.

Smyth, J. (1989). Developing and sustaining critical reflection in teacher education. Journal of Teacher Education, ?, 2-9.

Tabachnick, B. R. & Zeichner, K. (1991). Issues and practice in inquiry-oriented teacher education. New York: The Falmer Press.

Tierney, R. J., Carter, M. A. & Desai, L. E. (1991). Portfolio assessment in the reading-writing classroom. Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon.